DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 371 CS 013 952

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TITLE "A Smarter Summer": Guest Columns on Summer Learning. America Reads Challenge.
INSTITUTION Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 2000-00-00
NOTE 20p.
AVAILABLE FROM America Reads Challenge, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-0107. Tel: 202-401-8888. ED Pubs, P.O. Box 1398, Jessup, MD 20794-1398. Tel: 877-433-7827 (Toll Free). For full text: http://www.ed.gov/americareads/summer_smart.html.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Art Activities; Early Childhood Education; Elementary Education; Fine Arts; Learning Activities; Library Role; Mathematics Activities; Parent Participation; *Reading Improvement; Reading Skills; Science Activities; *Summer Programs; Television Viewing; Tutoring; *Writing Improvement; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

How kids spend summer vacation has a direct and powerful impact on their success in school. This document presents 8 brief (600-word) newspaper columns that offer parents simple tips on how to promote learning through everyday activities. Each column ends with a referral for free resources to keep children learning outside the classroom. The newspaper columns are: (1) "Sneaking a Smarter Summer" (which kicks off a smarter summer with simple learning activities and offers a free activity poster to build reading and writing skills); (2) "A Smarter Summer: Less TV" (which encourages parents to limit summer viewing, making the most of TV, and offers kids alternatives to promote learning); (3) "A Smarter Summer: Revolution at the Library" (which addresses the dramatic changes taking place in public libraries as they become a greater resource for their communities); (4) "A Smarter Summer: Write It Right! (which discusses how parents can help children succeed in school by building writing skills during the summer); (5) "A Smarter Summer: Math and Science" (which addresses the importance on achievement in math and science and how parents can make math and science learning fun); (6) "A Smarter Summer: The Arts Advantage" (which offers guidance for parents on how to use the visual arts, dance, music, and drama to develop skills that help children learn in school); (7) "A Smarter Summer: It's Never too Early to Learn" (which discusses how babies, toddlers, and preschoolers can gain skills and love learning); and (8) "A Smarter Summer: Back to School" (which addresses how parents can continue to teach children once school is in session, and how communities can get free reading tutors paid by "Uncle Sam"). (RS)

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"A Smarter Summer": Guest Colums on Summer Learning. America Reads Challenge.

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Dear Editor:

Did you know that how kids spend *summer vacation* has a direct and powerful impact on their success in school? Failure to exercise the brain during the summer can erode, or even erase, a student's school year gains. One urban school study found that large gaps in achievement between high and low-income elementary school students were due entirely to gains made when school was *not* in session!

But *every* parent can help his or her child to achieve, without costly toys, camps, or travel. America Reads, at the U.S. Department of Education, *is asking for your help* in offering every child in your community "A Smarter Summer". Enclosed are eight guest columns, one for each week of summer. The first is written by Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley. The others are written by America Reads Director Carol Rasco.

These 600-word "News You Can Use" columns offer parents simple tips on how to promote learning through everyday activities. Each column ends with a referral for free resources to keep children learning outside the classroom.

Research shows that frequent summer reading is particularly helpful for elementary school children. The first column offers a free reading and writing "activity poster" featuring the popular book and TV character *Arthur* (enclosed). The last column addresses "back to school" challenges and offers *an exciting way for your community to obtain free reading tutors* through local colleges and universities.

The middle six columns may be run in any order. Of course, you need not run the entire series, but may prefer to select those you feel would mean the most to your readership. We also encourage you to consider reporting on exemplary summer programs in your community—at libraries, schools, or youth centers—to supplement the columns with articles and resources of interest to local parents.

These columns may be copied electronically from the summer page of the America Reads Web site at: www.ed.gov/americareads. You may also find biographies and photographs of Riley and Rasco online at: www.ed.gov/offices/OS/riley.html and www.ed.gov/offices/OS/rasco.html. For actual photographs or for more information, please contact Kim Bassett at 202/401-8888.

Thank you for your consideration. We hope your newspaper will take this opportunity to empower parents to become their children's best teachers.

The America Reads Challenge is a grassroots national campaign that challenges every American to help all our children learn to read.

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"A Smarter Summer"
Guest Columns on Summer Learning

#1
Sneaking in a Smarter Summer
Kicks off a smarter summer with simple learning activities and offers a free activity poster to build reading and writing skills.

#2
A Smarter Summer: Less TV
Encourages parents to limit summer viewing, make the most of TV, and offer kids alternatives to promote learning.

#3
A Smarter Summer: Revolution at the Library
Addresses the dramatic changes taking place in public libraries as they become a greater resource for their communities.

#4
A Smarter Summer: Write it Right!
How parents can help children succeed in school by building writing skills during the summer.

#5
A Smarter Summer: Math and Science
The importance of achievement in math and science and how parents can make math and science learning fun.

#6
A Smarter Summer: The Arts Advantage
Guidance for parents on how to use the visual arts, dance, music, and drama to develop skills that help children to learn in school.

#7
A Smarter Summer: It's Never Too Early To Learn
How babies, toddlers, and preschoolers can gain skills and love learning.

#8
A Smarter Summer: Back to School
How parents can continue to teach children once school is in session, and how communities can get free reading tutors paid by Uncle Sam.

All summer columns available on the Web at: www.ed.gov/americareads.

AMERICA READS

#1
SNEAKING IN A SMARTER SUMMER
By U.S. Education Secretary Richard W. Riley

"No more pencils, no more books!
No more teachers' crazy looks!"

Are your kids looking forward to summer vacation? Great! But don't toss out those books and pencils yet —"summer fun" doesn't have to mean "dumber fun"! Exercising kids' brain muscles all summer brings big benefits in the fall. And not exercising them can mean a loss of hard-earned skills.

A wise parent or caregiver can sneak a lot of learning into those lazy, hazy days. The good news is you don't need a lot of extra time or cash to give your kids a smarter summer. The trick is to make a game out of learning every day. Here are a few ideas:

- Challenge younger children to find letters of the alphabet on everyday items like street signs, cereal boxes, or newspapers. By asking "How many A's can you find?" you also exercise counting skills.

- Have an older child practice math by using grocery coupons to calculate the final price of items on your list. Challenge the child to guess the weight of produce before reading the scale, and to compute the correct change at the checkout.

- Any daily reading, yes, even comic books, is good for your child's brain. A librarian can help your child select books on any topic—baseball or butterflies, horses or hurricanes. The secret is for the child to choose the subject, so that it doesn't feel like homework and he or she is truly reading for pleasure.

- Writing weekly letters to a pen pal or distant friend won't feel like schoolwork, especially if the contents are strictly private! And older kids won't care that crossword puzzles boost spelling and vocabulary, if you make it a game while traveling or cooking dinner.

- Have kids "paint" their names with water on a hot sidewalk, then watch the letters disappear! To sneak in some science, have kids guess how long it takes for wet footprints to evaporate, then time it. Challenge them to guess the melting time of ice cubes. Drop items in a pail of water to see if they sink or float. Have children record all guesses and results, and reward the "players" with frozen treats.

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Sneaking In A Smarter Summer (continued)

- For more sly science fun, find two similar, healthy plants. Have your child water one, but not the other, for a week or two, and observe daily. Make a leaf tattoo by gently clipping a small paper shape onto a large leaf. Remove the shape after a week. Discuss the results and have the child write it up to share the experiment with family members.

- Help your child make his or her own storybook. Make funny drawings, or glue photos of family members onto silly magazine pictures. A younger child can dictate the story; older children can write it themselves. Let creativity rule!

- America Reads, at the U.S. Department of Education, is giving away a free, colorful poster with PBS TV star Arthur on the front, and fun reading and writing activities on the back. When the activities are finished at summer's end, the child receives a certificate of accomplishment. Now that's a summer celebration!

Once you banish the boredom of "dumber summers", you'll be sneaking in the most valuable lesson of all—never take a vacation from learning!

To make this a bright and brainy summer, call (877) 4ED-PUBS and order your child's free Arthur Activity Poster in English or Spanish. For more activities, ask for free brochures, called Summer Home Learning Recipes, to suit your children's ages. (To order materials online, go to www.ed.gov pubs.) For more guidance on reading and other learning subjects, call (800) USA-LEARN, or go to the America Reads Web site at www.ed.gov americareads.

AMERICA READS

#2
A SMARTER SUMMER:
Less TV

By Carol H. Rasco, Director, America Reads Challenge

Would you allow your child to spend summer vacation watching television every waking moment for two straight months? Of course not! Yet over the course of a year, that is how much time the average child watches TV—one thousand hours, or more than 60 16-hour days!

The shows kids watch add up, and summer's free time can mean even more time for the tube. But most parents don't want their kids to have a "dumber summer." That's when a student's school year gains are eroded or erased by months of mental idleness.

National studies show a decline in achievement when kids watch TV more than 10-15 hours per week. Students earn higher test scores when they read more and watch TV less. But few children can regulate themselves when it comes to TV—most spend as much time with TV in one day as they spend reading for fun in a week!

When parents take charge, however, the benefits are far-reaching. In a recent study by PBS, parents who took charge of their child's TV viewing got remarkable results.

Their children watched 40% less TV each week and viewed more educational shows. Parents were far more likely to watch and discuss the shows with their children. The parents also read books to children more often, and for longer periods, and took more trips to the library and bookstore. Why do these changes matter?

They matter because smart alternatives to TV can provide a big boost to your child's brain. Did you know that the vocabulary of the average children's book is greater than that found on prime-time television? Reading also builds your child's knowledge of new subjects. In addition, reading practice advances the brain's ability to recognize new words automatically, a key step toward faster reading.

Committing to a smarter summer won't cost you a cent, but it will enrich your kids' vacation. Here are a few ways your child can shine this summer, while the TV screen stays dark.

(more)

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A Smarter Summer: Less TV (continued)

1) Nurture an interest in reading. Visit the library instead of the video store. Let your children choose their own books, with guidance from a librarian. If a child has a favorite TV interest, like basketball or science fiction, help find books on the topic. Don't underestimate the entertainment value of the library. It really can compete with videos when given the chance.

2) Hold a Camp-In. Before dark, set up a campsite in your home. String up sheets to create a tent; use blankets for bedrolls. Turn off all electrical equipment and rely on flashlights. Have family members tell stories, eat snacks, play games, and sing songs around a pretend campfire. Allow the children to sleep in their "tent". At breakfast, ask how much they missed TV.

3) Play "Michael Unplugged" (fill in your child's name). At least once this summer, take a family pledge to not watch TV for a week. Then have each child record his or her unplugged activities—books read, letters written, and other activity during the usual TV time. At the end of the week, have a celebration, ask children which alternative they liked best, and discuss future cutbacks on viewing.

Remember, your hand is on the remote control. Use it wisely, and you'll change your child's channel to a smarter summer.

For free activity kits and more information on children and reading, call (800) USA-LEARN or go to www.ed.gov americareads. For more on alternatives to TV, call TV-Free America at (202) 887-0436 or go to www.tvfa.org.

AMERICA READS

#3
A SMARTER SUMMER: Revolution at the Library

By Carol H. Rasco, Director, America Reads Challenge

Imagine entering a plain brick building on a lovely summer day. You pass a dozen parked strollers and hear the giddy laughter of babies. To your right, toys are strewn on a soft carpet where mothers and toddlers play. Young voices sing "Four and Twenty Blackbirds" with gusto.

At computers to your left, three boys work on their own online sports magazine. Two girls solve the design problems of a machine they created. An instructor guides some parents through the Web, in Spanish.

In a corner, caregivers are coached on reading aloud "The Three Bears" with dramatic flair. Small children color the alphabet while their mothers learn about childhood nutrition. A woman arranges to send a Story Van to a housing project for a cultural festival.

In a meeting room, a half-dozen teachers learn how to make better use of the Internet. In an adjacent room, a toddler with frequent ear infections is tested for speech delay.

And, oh yes, you see books. Lots and lots of books.

What is this place, you ask? An expensive child care center? A private computer school? A bilingual community center?

It's the local branch of a public library.

A lot has changed at the library. It's been a quiet revolution until now, librarians being the brilliant but modest folks we've always admired.

But a buzz is building. As old barriers crumble, the image of the staid old library is giving way to the noisy, online, family-friendly learning center that is the destiny of libraries of the future.

Summer is the perfect time to see where your library is heading on this revolutionary trail. While not every library offers all the opportunities I've described, many now offer far more than stacks of wonderful books. For example:

(more)

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A Smarter Summer: Revolution at the Library (continued)

- Free parent workshops on how to raise a reader
- Videos, CDs, and toys to take home
- Ideas for kids on fun summer reading
- Summer reading programs with goals and rewards
- Opportunities to pair children with adult reading tutors
- Access to computers for those already skilled
- Training on computers for those seeking skills
- Arts activities to help children communicate
- Toys and books for children with special needs
- Books and classes in a family's home language
- Literacy workshops for teachers and child care providers
- Free materials on child nutrition and development
- Adult literacy support, so parents can teach their children

Sound good? For a smarter summer, drop by your local branch and see what's cooking. Maybe your kids can borrow toys, go online, or sign up to win a pizza for reading a dozen books. Maybe you can sign up for a computer class, learn how to better buckle a car seat, or pick up a schedule of literacy activities for your childcare provider. You might even borrow some good books!

There's a revolution going on at your community library – check it out!

Find the booklet "Helping Your Child Use the Library" at www.ed.gov pubs Library. For more information on children and reading, call the U.S. Department of Education at (800) USA-LEARN, or visit online at www.ed.gov americareads. For library resources, contact the ALA's Association for Library Service for Children at (800) 545-2433 ext. 2163 or online at www.ala.org alsc; and Libraries for the Future at (800) 542-1918 or online at www.lff.org.

AMERICA READS

#4
A SMARTER SUMMER: Write It Right!

By Carol H. Rasco, Director, America Reads Challenge

Laps in a pool. A bouncing basketball. A swinging bat.

Summer is the perfect time to practice, practice, practice. Kids enjoy repetition when they can take pleasure in it. And they see for themselves that practice works.

But what about writing? Like any skill, writing improves with practice. Studies show that many kids would do better in school if their writing improved. Whether it's a young child forming letters on paper, or an older child writing a poem, summer offers a wonderful chance to hone skills that are crucial to school success.

Family members and other adults can help children have fun with writing. Here are 10 easy steps to get you started.

1. **Demonstrate the importance of writing.** Do you write a list of groceries or write a check to pay for them? Do you write on birthday cards or take down messages from the answering machine? Show your child how strong writing ability can open doors by explaining the writing involved in various jobs.

2. **Provide a good place to write.** A quiet environment with stimulating books can inspire your child's writing muse. A desk or table with good lighting eases the mechanics of writing. Both lined and unlined paper is useful, as are writing tools like pens, pencils, markers, and crayons.

3. **Allow time for writing.** Set aside a certain time each day or week to write. Get your child in the mood to write to a pen pal with a regular Saturday bowl of popcorn. Encourage your child to record the day in a personal journal each night.

4. **Follow what your child enjoys.** If your child likes a special song, encourage him to write out the lyrics. Have children make lists of favorite possessions: books, dolls, baseball cards. Start a story about a favorite subject or character, and let her write the ending.

5. **Play writing games together.** Crossword puzzles, anagrams, and cryptograms for children can be found in newspapers or inexpensive booklets.

6. **Bring a notebook on outings**. Encourage your child to take notes on nature walks, bus or car trips, or special visits to a museum or zoo.

(more)

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A Smarter Summer: Write It Right! (continued)

7. **Develop advanced writing skills.** Make up stories aloud and help your child decide: who are the main characters? What is the setting? What problems are faced and how are they resolved? Arrange for your child to interview someone special and write up what he learned.

8. **Express feelings.** Encourage children to draw and write about personal thoughts and feelings. Writing poems or songs gives children new ways to express themselves.

9. **Write a book review.** Ask your child to read a book and write a review. If you can use a computer at home or the library, e-mail the book report to America Reads at the U.S. Department of Education and it may be posted on our Web site. Share the thrill of your child's first published words!

10. **Order a free summer activity poster.** America Reads is offering a colorful poster for kids in grades K-5, with PBS star Arthur and family on the front, and fun reading and writing activities on the back.

Follow these steps for a smarter summer and you will see results when your child goes back to school. With practice, your child will learn to "write it right!"

For a free Arthur Activity Poster in English or Spanish, call (877) 4ED-PUBS. Find fun "Spider-Man" writing games on the America Reads Web site at www.ed.gov americareads kids.html. To submit a book report for publication on the America Reads site, e-mail it to READWRITENOW @ ed.gov.

AMERICA READS

#5
A SMARTER SUMMER: Math and Science

By Carol H. Rasco, Director, America Reads Challenge

Parents, do you remember learning this math fact?
The distance between Point A and Point B equals the distance between Point B and Point A.

Or, in the words of Mother Goose:
From Wimbleton to Wobbleton is fifteen miles.
From Wobbleton to Wimbleton is fifteen miles.
From Wimbleton to Wobbleton, from Wobbleton to Wimbleton,
From Wimbleton to Wobbleton is fifteen miles.

Which version so you think your child would recall? Certainly the funny one is more memorable. Mother Goose disguises the math in a wonderful poem that introduces the same concept.

It's human nature to enjoy learning. Kids and adults master new concepts best when learning is creative and hands-on. Imagine your child playing "Wimbleton to Wobbleton" with toy trains and a ruler and you're picturing a successful math experience.

Although it's centuries old, Mother Goose's simple lesson can teach us a lot in the summer of 2000. That's because summertime is the right time for math and science fun. Opportunities abound, and wise use of the summer months can give your child an advantage when school resumes. Studies show that kids keep skills sharp when they exercise their brains during school vacation.

As we adults know, the demand for skills in mathematics and science is growing quickly. To be successful in college and the workplace, today's students must master challenging math and science skills. But it's easy to help your child get ready.

The first step is to nurture a positive attitude toward math and science. Girls in particular may benefit from extra encouragement. Avoid comments like "science isn't for everybody" or "I didn't like math either."

Second, let your child explore the variety of interests that summer study offers. If a special interest develops in butterflies or the speed of a baseball pitch, let the child take the lead. Follow up with library books, Web sites, and outings that feed the child's imagination.

(more)

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A Smarter Summer: Math and Science (continued)

Third, use summer's relaxed schedule to offer kids the chance to experiment freely. Or, as Mother Goose puts it:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

Kids can guess: what will happen if an egg is dropped on a sidewalk, a pillow, or a lawn? They can test their predictions and determine cause and effect. They can experiment: why can't an egg be put back together again? They can introduce variables: what if the egg is hard-boiled? What if it is covered in bubble wrap? What if the height of the drop is changed?

As you can see, you don't need special tools to help your kids learn math and science. Simple collections of rocks, shells, or bugs enable children to practice counting and to see similarities and patterns. Household items like newspapers, laundry, clocks, and plants can become tools for learning. Special summer outings such as nature walks or block walks can expand your child's math and science horizons.

By playing Mother Goose and Father Gander, you can guide your children toward a zany, brainy summer.

For free publications on helping your children learn, call the U.S. Department of Education at (877) 4ED-PUBS. Ask about "Summer Home Learning Recipes", the "Learning Partners" booklet, or the "Helping Your Child Learn" series. (Order materials online at www.ed.gov/pubs.) For more information on math and science learning, call (800) USA-LEARN.

AMERICA READS

#6
A SMARTER SUMMER: The Arts Advantage

By Carol H. Rasco, Director, America Reads Challenge

Is your refrigerator covered with the art of a junior Picasso? If so, you may already know about the arts advantage in education.

The arts help prepare children to read and write by developing visual and motor skills. Painting, drawing, and sculpture also help children learn to make choices, use memory, and express feelings.

The educational benefits of other art forms, like dance, drama, and music, are also significant. Major studies reveal multiple advantages when students participate in the arts. The 1999 report *Champions of Change* found that students who participate in music and theater, for example, are highly likely to enjoy success in mathematics and reading.

In addition, arts learning helps level the playing field for even the most disadvantaged children. The arts can reach students who are bored, failing at conventional studies, or otherwise disengaged from learning. These "classroom failures" and "problem students" can become high achievers in arts settings that value diverse styles of learning.

The visual arts, dance, music, and theatre employ multiple skills and develop abilities that will be highly valued in our children's futures. The evolving workplace has increased the demand for creative thinkers who can generate ideas and communicate in a variety of media. The arts offer excellent training in these critical areas.

Summertime is playtime for many youngsters, with recreation a high priority. But I urge all parents of young children to make creation a high value, too. Guiding your children to arts enjoyment during summer vacation can revitalize learning and open new avenues for expression.

Here are simple tips for giving your kids the arts advantage this summer.

1. Seek a balance of activities: indoor and outdoor, group and individual, using music, dance, drama, crayons, paint, clay, or collage.
2. Provide choices and let the child discover likes and dislikes.
3. Focus on the process, not the product. That is the treasure.
4. Allow enough time to repeat and practice skills.
5. Encourage the child's free expression and imagination.
6. Keep activities flexible to allow for flow and spontaneity.
7. Expose children to works of art through free summer shows and exhibits.

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A Smarter Summer: The Arts Advantage (continued)

- **Babies:** Music and movement can soothe, stimulate, and teach. Make singing a ritual throughout the day. Sway, shake rattles, and move the baby's arms and legs to music.

- **Toddlers age (age 1-2):** Provide spoons, pots, and bowls for drumming. Clap to music and play finger games. Do simple dances to develop balance. Animate sock puppets. Use words to develop speaking and listening skills.

- **Preschoolers (age 2-3):** Pretend to be animals. Ask children to respond to different music. Provide dress-up clothes for dramatic play. Let children choose the songs, stories, and colors they prefer. Use play dough.

- **Preschoolers (age 3-4)**: Act out scenes from favorite books or draw the characters. Try pantomime. Count beats to music. Recite nursery rhymes. Improve dexterity by stringing beads or pasta. Make collages from household junk.

- **Primary grades (age 5-8):** Tell original stories. Make story books, scrapbooks and portfolios of artwork. Encourage opinions on others' art. Practice improvisation. Perform a summer play integrating painting, music, dance, and drama.

Most importantly, make sure it's fun! By nurturing your little Georgia O'Keeffe or Alvin Ailey, you can combine creation with recreation, and give your child the arts advantage this summer.

For more tips and activities, see the "Learning Partners" booklet at www.ed.gov pubs parents LearnPartners art.html. For more information on children and the arts, call (800) USA-LEARN, visit the Arts Education Partnership at http: aep-arts.org or visit the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts at www.wolftrap.org.

AMERICA READS

#7

A SMARTER SUMMER: It's Never Too Early To Learn

By Carol H. Rasco, Director, America Reads Challenge

For decades, doctors told parents that their newborns were like blank slates. Today, in the book *The Scientist in the Crib*, a baby's mind is described as "the most powerful learning machine in the universe." Most education experts agree.

But this head-turning new model of early childhood often leaves parents confused about what's best for their very young child. Many parents I speak with wonder if they should buy the latest learning tools that promise to make their infants into Superbabies or to turn their toddlers and preschoolers into little Einsteins.

The good news is you don't need expensive toys, videos, flashcards, or CDs to build your baby's brain. A caring parent or caregiver can find many "teachable moments" in the everyday play of babies, toddlers and preschoolers. And summer offers the perfect time to begin.

By learning through play, young children gain skills that help them get ready for school. This can be especially important for five-year-olds in the summer before kindergarten.

Here are eight simple steps for a super smart summer.

1) Talking: Simply talking to young children stimulates brain activity. Choose summer themes to tell stories, sing songs, recite nursery rhymes, and describe the world. Name things and encourage your child's efforts to talk.

2) Reading: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents begin reading aloud to babies at 6 months old. Summer is a great time to start a daily reading ritual. Frequent reading opens windows on the world, feeds children's imaginations, and teaches them to associate books with your love. These experiences motivate young children to become independent readers.

3) Libraries: Books for babies and children are available free at your local library. Librarians often offer special summer story times and other activities for preschool children. Studies show that the best readers come from homes with lots of books. Get your child his or her own library card and make visiting the library a lifelong habit.

(more)

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A Smarter Summer: It's Never Too Early To Learn (continued)

4) TV: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends waiting until your child is at least two years old before exposure to TV, and then limiting viewing to an hour or less per day. Choose only nonviolent, educational shows and avoid commercials. Watch with your child to ask and answer questions that extend learning.

5) Writing: Provide a well-lit table or desk and a variety of papers and writing tools. Encourage the child, without pressure for the writing to "look like" something. Refrigerator magnets can help teach the shapes of the alphabet. Most preschoolers enjoy learning to write their own names.

6) Math: Learning the names and symbols of numerals is a big early childhood accomplishment. Toddlers and preschoolers can play simple counting games and grasp concepts like more and less, heavy and light, long and short. Learning about squares, circles, and rectangles is a step toward geometry. Develop pre-math skills by sorting laundry, counting toys, or baking brownies.

7) Science: Engage your child's natural curiosity. Babies are fascinated by soap bubbles. Toddlers can watch an ant hill and collect rocks. Preschoolers can learn about watering plants and washing hands. All young children enjoy learning about animals.

8) Arts & Music: Music, painting, dance, and dramatic play help build language, coordination, listening, spatial, and other skills. Proudly display your child's creations.

Loving parents can raise bright kids without high-priced gimmicks. By finding "smart moments" every day this summer, and throughout the year, you will give your child the most valuable of gifts: the love of learning.

Call (877) 4ED-PUBS for the free booklet "Building Your Baby's Brain". Find the online booklet "Early Childhood: Where Learning Begins—Mathematics" at www.ed.gov/pubs/EarlyMath. For more information, call (800) USA-LEARN or visit the Kids and Families pages of the America Reads Web site at: www.ed.gov/americareads.

AMERICA READS

#8
A SMARTER SUMMER:
Back To School

By Carol H. Rasco, Director, America Reads Challenge

This summer's gas prices set records, but it's also been a smarter summer for record numbers of American children.

This year, nearly 3 million children participated in *Read*Write*Now!*, a U.S. Department of Education project that gives kids an alternative to "dumber summer syndrome." That's when months of mental idleness erode or erase a student's school year gains.

Many more youngsters benefited from summer literacy programs at schools, libraries, camps, and community centers. Each of these varied programs has one thing in common: the view of summer not as "time off" from learning, but as an essential bridge to the next grade.

The good habits kids learn during a smarter summer should be nurtured once they are back in school. For example:

- **Reading for pleasure,** to inspire a constructive, lifelong habit.
- **Visiting the library,** to expose kids to an abundance of knowledge.
- **Limiting TV time,** to allow kids' brainpower to blossom.
- **Finding fun in learning,** to make life a greater adventure.

As summer draws to a close, parents can continue to be their children's best teachers. Family members can help their children to read aloud, do crossword puzzles, calculate coupons, and explore science through cooking. Adults can encourage children to write letters to relatives or pen pals. Daily practice keeps skills sharp.

Of course, some children still need extra help once school is in session, particularly in reading and math. Fortunately, a new source of help is available in virtually every community.

Through the U.S. Department of Education's America Reads and America Counts programs, college students earn financial aid for tutoring children in reading or math. The government pays up to 100% of their wages through the Federal Work-Study program at colleges, universities, and trade schools. It doesn't cost parents or schools a dime, and college students earn money to pay for books, tuition, and other expenses.

(more)

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A Smarter Summer: Back To School (continued)

More than 1,400 colleges and universities volunteered for the America Reads program in its first few years. It worked so well, Congress passed a new law requiring virtually all institutions to place reading tutors in their communities after July 1, 2000. That's a total of 3,400 institutions of higher education whose students can help children to succeed in school. Students may even tutor parents who need help with their own literacy skills

How can you tap this resource in your community? Contact the Financial Aid Office at your local college or university. If the institution already has an America Reads program, ask the financial aid officer to send more tutors to your child's elementary school, child care center, community center, or after-school program. Many institutions will be expanding their number of community service jobs this fall.

If the institution's program is just beginning, seize your chance to become an early partner. Offer to introduce the financial aid officer to your child's teacher, child care director, community group, or after-school program leader. These folks can identify the struggling students who need extra time and attention from a personal tutor.

Back-to-school time is no time to slack off in helping all children to achieve. Extending learning beyond the classroom will build better students. More tutors and brighter summers mean smarter kids in record numbers.

*For details on the America Reads*America Counts Federal Work-Study program, call the U.S. Department of Education at (800) USA-LEARN. Information is on the web at www.ed.gov americareads and www.ed.gov americacounts. For guidance on how parents can help kids learn, call (877) ED-PUBS and ask about free publications in the "Helping Your Child" series.*